

EXPLORING WHO STUDENTPRENEURS ARE BY UNDERSTANDING THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCE AS ENTREPRENEURS

By

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Doctoral Thesis

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PAPERS CONTAINED IN THIS THESIS

The following list summarises Julien Marchand's particular contribution to the joint paper directly included in this thesis.

Paper	Marchand's Contribution
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ABSTRACT

While famous university dropouts (such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and more recently Mark Zuckerberg) have captured media attention, and there is an enterprising culture developing among students that it is ‘cool’ to be an entrepreneur, the academic literature is to a great extent silent about the phenomenon of studentpreneurs. Studentpreneurs are students who are already running a business and generating revenue. Studying such phenomenon is important for several reasons. First, it is part of the more general rise of entrepreneurial careers which is changing the structure of the economy and the structure of work. Second, it is interesting from a policy standpoint since governments around the world are dedicating significant resources to incentivise this type of activity and competing to attract entrepreneurs that come with the promise of economic growth. Third the rise of the entrepreneurial university and attraction of ‘student entrepreneurship talent’ is becoming a focus for universities. Developing students as entrepreneurs is not just about education or teaching; understanding their drivers, experience, identity and capabilities goes a long way in enabling a supportive context, informing policy but also potentially guiding practice.

This study focuses on the lived experiences of studentpreneurs. Phenomenology is the underpinning philosophy because it emphasises participants’ experience and understanding of certain phenomena. The aim of this research is to understand who studentpreneurs are by studying the lived experience of several studentpreneurs through long interviews. There are two areas of focus in this study: the types of identity work they go through during their entrepreneurial journey and the individual dynamic capabilities they develop during their venture creation.

The study contributes to identity theory by elucidating the identity work of studententrepreneurs, using dynamic capability theory to understand their journey, explicitly revealing the importance of sensemaking and serendipity. The thesis has a theoretical and practical contribution. Practically it is useful for three groups: studentpreneurs themselves, advisors and administrators providing support, and entrepreneurship educators. Theoretical contributions include a typology of studentpreneurs, illucidation of the types of identity work they perform, and a framework of dynamic entrepreneurial capabilities of studentpreneurs. Practical contributions include tools for administrators of support programs for studentpreneurs

such as an identification of studentpreneurs by profile and suggestions for fostering the development of studentpreneurs.

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Preamble

From a very early age, I have maintained an ongoing interest and direct involvement in entrepreneurship and innovation. Some relevant key experiences are worthy of mention:

- My first entrepreneurial experience as the president of my student union for two years (2000–2002).
- My first professional entrepreneurial experience managing a website and a blog (Marchand 2005) on Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, which contributed to an MBA thesis.
- The leadership of Bikey, a sustainable smartphone application development company with five staff, which received the prestigious Apps4NSW prize from the New South Wales Government for the Bike Community Hub application (2011).
- My current role as a mentor for student entrepreneurs at the following annual competitions:
 - The UTS Project Pitch at University of Technology Sydney (2014);
 - The Peter Farrell Cup at the University of New South Wales (2014);
 - Generation Innovation on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland (2015).
- My role in organising competitions for student entrepreneurs, such as Startup Weekend Sunshine Coast (2015).
- My current position as a broadcaster on the StudentPreneur podcast (2015), where each week I interview a student entrepreneur to raise awareness about student entrepreneurship.

These first-hand experiences and knowledge of student and non-student entrepreneurship informed my choice of thesis subject and fuelled my desire to pursue the challenging yet exciting journey of a higher research degree. Significant benefits

come from this experience. In my regular meetings with student and non-student entrepreneurs (through meet-ups, incubators and entrepreneurship weekends), I am considered 'one of them'. The subjects of my studies are willing to share more with me than they would be if I were an outsider.

Interestingly, through spending ten years of my working life in innovation for small and medium businesses (SMBs), as well as larger organisations like Capgemini E&Y and Telstra, I came to a realisation: the earlier one develops the mindset of entrepreneurship, the greater chance one has of eventually starting a stable business. After more than 50 interviews with young entrepreneurs through my podcast and more than a dozen mentees, I am convinced that my thinking is right. Young people who start entrepreneurial activities in high school or university already have some experience in running a business by the time they graduate. They have had time to fail and learn several times in a safe environment while most of their living expenses were taken care of by their parents. Commonly, the stigma of failure does not stick to them because their main identity at the time is that of a student, rather than an entrepreneur. As a student, they have not failed. However, starting a business during school is not an easy thing to do. These young entrepreneurs may not take great financial risks, but they risk their time. They give up social activities to work on their venture. They also sacrifice time they could be spending on their studies. As a result, many student entrepreneurs I interviewed for my podcast shared the fact that they had failed courses, and the majority had to enrol part-time to be able to study and to run their business.

My personal goal is twofold: to understand these student entrepreneurs in order to develop programs that support them as they balance the tasks of studying and creating new ventures, and to raise awareness of student entrepreneurship in order to attract more of them. My own son is already learning how he can make money as an artist. He is learning how to buy equipment that can help him maximise his return and expand his venture. He is only six years old. I hope that by the time he reaches university, support programs for studentpreneurs will exist.